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WHAT DO STUDENTS THINK OF THE CHURCH?

There is a wide-spread feeling among students that the Church is inefficient and perhaps unnecessary. Some would go so far as to say that it is a positive hindrance to the religion of Christ. It seems to them to be reactionary, devoted to standards of doctrine and practice that are largely outgrown and giving its time to ecclesiastical and creedal discussions that are unimportant while at the same time it fails to champion the great social ideals that are challenging students today or to address itself seriously to the perplexing and menacing social problems that seem to call for a Christian solution.

It is for the sake of honest candid inquiry concerning the Church and its work that this tentative outline has been prepared. The work has been done under the direction of a sub committee of the Commission on the Church and the Christian Way of Life which is a part of a larger project that is conducting an Inquiry with a view to holding within the near future a National Conference on the Christian Way of Life. In addition to the Commission on the Church three other Commissions are conducting similar studies - Christianity and International Relations, Christianity and Industry, and Christianity and Race Relations.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Wide participation of students in this Inquiry is sought not only for the sake of clarifying their own thinking about the Church but in order to secure their contribution toward the report which the National Commission will make to the National Conference. This is but a preliminary draft intended to aid in discovering the kind of syllabus which might be useful to students

desiring to study the Church and the Christian Way of Life.

Those who receive this outline are asked to enlist a small group which would meet if possible for at least several sessions to engage in the task of discovering which of the issues raised here seem to them to be living, which seem to be of no importance and what other issues should be included in a syllabus which is aimed to be of value to student groups studying the Church.

This list of questions is merely suggestive of the main lines of data that might be considered in students' discussions on the Church. It presupposes a group of students already sufficiently interested in the Church to be willing to face the question directly.

It is hoped that everyone who uses this outline will make a careful list of the points of interest, conviction and conclusions that come from the discussion and forward them to The Inquiry, 129 East 52nd Street, New York City, in order that these may be built into a fuller outline to be made later. In your reply please indicate very specifically the questions that get a "rise" out of the group and those which fall flat.

The basis of the questions that constitute this outline is a piece of work done by groups of students in Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. conferences in 1924, in each of which, groups of students undertook to create a tentative questionnaire on the basis of their intimate knowledge of the questions concerning the Church that are current on college campuses. It is intended that this shall be an honest inquiry which shall eliminate every tendency toward propaganda and thus make possible an expression of student opinion on the Church which shall have value because it is marked by intelligence and reality.

DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

It has been agreed for the purposes of this discussion that we shall think of the Church as the aggregate number of professed followers of Christ who find organized expression in general bodies (the separate Communions) and in local congregations. The discussion group should avoid waste of time by making sure that this and other such terms are clearly defined in advance so that there is a common understanding by the members of the group.

CORRESPONDENCE

For the sake of brevity the National Conference on the Christian Way of Life is referred to as The Inquiry. For further information address The Inquiry, 129 East 52nd Street, New York City.

THE CHURCH

I. WAYS IN WHICH THE CHURCH WORKS

A. Teaching

1. Do the sermons you hear seem to be "prophetic messages" or are they "intellectually trivial" and "spiritually sterile"?

2. What is the value of sermons?

3. In many phases of education, the lecture method is giving way to that of conference and discussion. In view of this, what should be the place of the sermon in the educational program of the Church?

4. In how far do the ministers you know seem to have the educational training necessary for helpful guidance in the solution of the problems which confront the Church and society?

5. What is the quality of the teaching in the Sunday School? To what degree does it develop religious intelligence and supply adequate moral motives?

6. What ought the Church to teach? Can it do so with its present facilities?

7. What is the place of creeds and doctrine in the teaching of the Church? Do Church creeds possess any final sanction? Is the Church bound to uphold creed, and is it, therefore, not open-eyed to new truth?

8. Some say the Church's preaching and teaching is mainly untrue and hostile to progress. What do you think? How did you come by your opinion?

B. WORSHIP

1. Do you find your friends eager to participate in church worship, or do they feel dutiful or do they do nothing? Why? To what extent do you share their feeling and activity?

2. Just what do you mean by worship?

   a. Is it listening to sermons?
   b. Is it the sense of social unity in a corporate act of praise of God? If so, why does God need to be praised?
   c. What purpose is served by ascribing to God qualities which, if He possesses them, He is already aware of?
   d. How far does prayer enter into worship? What is prayer?
   e. What is the place of the sacraments in worship? What spiritual value do they hold? What place has symbolism in worship?
   f. Is worship something you do for yourself, for your neighbor or for God?
   g. What faculty is most employed in worship? Is it an attitude of the individual will in relation to others and to God or is it an intellectual recognition of the claims of God on ourselves and on others and a symbolic expression of these claims?

3. What are the values in public worship that may not be found in private worship?

4. How far is it necessary or advisable to hold to old forms of worship and old ways of expression of faith when they do not fully accord with modern notions?

   a. Should one participate in hymns, prayers, recitation of the creed, etc. when they are not in harmony with his innermost convictions?

5. What is the relation of worship to everyday Christian living?

   a. Would you say that worship is the main function of the Church and the promotion of righteousness incidental or do you hold a contrary view? How would you state your position?

6. Is there need for training in worship? If so, how could the Church best meet that need?

7. Do any conditions of college life and training affect the meaning and value of worship? What are they?

C. PROSLETYZING - EVANGELIZATION

1. Has an individual or group the right to propagate a faith?

2. Should the Church seek to enlist the unattached? If so,how?

3. Does conviction and the desire to convert ever lead to phariseeism? Need it?

4. Should the Church seek to enlist young people whose thinking has to no extent undergone the maturing process which comes with contact with new ideas of religion and of the Church?

5. Does the Church's program of evangelism have something to do with social progress? How about its missionary enterprise?

D. FELLOWSHIP

1. To what extent do students seek and find "group fellowship" in the Church today?

2. Do you object to the idea of group fellowship in religion? Why? Or do you object to the way fellowship is expressed in the churches at present?

3. Does church fellowship as you know it actually differ in important respects from the fellowship which other agencies afford? If so, in what ways? If not, should it be different and how?

4. How would the spirit of fellowship express itself through the Church organization? How has it failed in fellowship? How can its organization become more truly a fellowship?

5. What does the Christian way of life require of a church in achieving fellowship where there are racial, economic, cultural or doctrinal differences?

6. Should a church receive into its membership persons of different racial or national or social groups? If so, unconditionally, or under what conditions? If not, why not?

7. Is it necessary or desirable that people who worship together should also enter into a common social fellowship? Is it the business of the Church to bring this about?

8. Some say that the Church should be a kind of laboratory for the testing and demonstration of principles and ideals of fellowship which may ultimately be wrought out in the life of the world. Do you agree with this statement? If so, what changes, if any, should be brought about in your church?

II The Task of the Church

1. For what does the Church exist? Should it concern itself with the spiritual problems of the personal life or with the great social questions of the day? Or is its task both personal and social? What distinctive contribution does the Church make to either of these problems?

2. How does the Church minister to the religious needs of the individual? Does it reveal to the individual the sources of spiritual life? What are these sources?

3. Are the principles of Jesus the accepted standard of conduct for church members?

   a. To what extent do they agree on what those principles are?

   b. To what realms of life are those principles supposed to apply - personal, economic, political, social, etc. On what is your opinion based?

   c. Does Jesus' teaching have any authority for you?

4. If it is the task of Christians to regenerate the social order, does this necessitate an organization like the Church? To what extent?

   a. What should be the relation of the Church to general agencies for social betterment?
   b. Should the Church engage in institutional projects such as hospitals, colleges, orphanages, etc. Under what circumstances? In what ways do such projects fulfill the Church's ideal? Are they ever a hindrance? How?
   c. Does the Church stand today in your mind as the champion for any large constructive social ideal? What?
   d. Should the Church cultivate and sensitize the social conscience? How?
   e. Under what conditions, if any, should the Church as an organization ever take sides in political or economic conflicts?
   f. What should be the attitude of the Church toward such problems as:

      War
      Immigration
      Marriage and divorce
      Labor conflicts
      Bad housing
      Civic evils
      Unwholesome amusements

5. Why are so many social idealists outside the Church?

6. Does the Church approve of the existing social order? On what do you base your opinion? If the Church does in practice approve the present order, can one who does not, work as effectively in and through the Church as outside?

7. Should the Church bring together industrial antagonists? If it should, does it?

III The Place of the Institution in Religion

1. To what extent does the Church regard religious faith as a spiritual experience, and to what extent as an assent to creed and doctrine?

2. Can one be spiritual without the Church? What is spirituality?

   a. Does the greatest creative thinking and the deepest spiritual experience come in groups or to one alone?

   b. Can such a spiritual experience remain vital if it is purely individualistic?

3. In response to what needs did the Church develop? Do these needs exist today?

   a. Which are distinctly religious needs?
   b. Which of these needs are being taken over by other agencies?
   c. Is the Church perpetuating itself by rendering services which are more popular than religion?

4. Does an institution like the Church aid or hinder real religion for young people today? Wherein?

   a. Is it possible for the Church to exist as a free fellowship of those in whom the Spirit of Christ is operative, and not as a formal organization at all?

   b. Or is it necessary to have an organization in order that the work of the Church may be done effectively?

   c. May the Church become too institutionalized and cease to be a generator of spiritual power and social vision? How deal with the Church if you think it is over-institutionalized?

   d. What do history and psychology teach of the need of institutions to incorporate ideals?

5. Is lack of Church unity a hindrance to the Church functioning effectively?

   a. How did denominations arise? In how far was the process valid?

   b. If the process was at all justified, in how far do the reasons for creating denominations justify their continuance today?

   c. If you believe in continuing denominations, what changes would you like to have effected?

d. If you believe that denominational divisions should end, what sort of organization would you have in their place? How much unity of thought and practice is desirable?

e. What process would you recommend to secure such unity as is needed?

6. Examine the following statements: Do you agree with any of them in whole or in part? Do you disagree with any? Why? What is your evidence for your opinions?

Some people say:

a. That the Church is the channel through which accumulative Christian experience pours itself down through the ages.

b. That it is within the Church that the person of Jesus Christ, His memory, His portrait, His teachings, His spirit has been kept alive.

c. That the way the Church has taught us to read the Gospels, in a traditional and uncritical way, has kept us from having a true picture and understanding of Jesus Christ. It has inoculated the world with a pseudo-Christianity so that it is immune to the religion of Christ.

d. That an ideal of the Church is to preserve the "spiritual heritage" of the past.

e. That in the largely commercialized and highly driven society of today there is need for witness to the reality and power of things unseen and eternal and that the Church performs this function.

f. That the Church is anti-Christian; that it is obsolete.

g. That individuals by pooling their spiritual life in a church make possible a collective achievement which a person acting alone could not have attempted.

h. That the corporate life of the Church creates a spiritual reservoir from which individuals can draw support in times of personal religious doubt or moral strain.

i. That the Church is the supreme agency through which young people may choose to carry on their life work.

7. Is the Church as now constituted justifying its existence and really showing Christ's way of life to the world? If not, should it be abandoned or should it be reformed and how?

a. Is the Church's worth to individuals and to society entitled to more lenient judgment than that accorded to other institutions? Has it a right to demand greater loyalty than they?

IV Students and the Church

1. What are the chief criticisms of the Church by young people of your acquaintance? In how far are the criticisms justified?

   a. Which criticisms seem to be merely excuses for shirking one's religious duties?

   b. Is there a moral obligation to be religiously intelligent?

2. In case of lack of harmony and cooperation between students and the Church, what is the Church's responsibility and what the responsibility of students.

3. What are the possible alternatives of action with regard to the Church before young men and women? What are the reasons in favor of each? What are the reasons against each? What decision should result?

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